1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

It is remarkable to contrast the effect on the tribal population 565 ●
of Ahiri of two influences, that of the zamindar and his administra- 177
tion at Ahiri and that of the Allapilli forest depot. The zamindar as a practising Raj-Gond, related both to the former royal house of Chanda and to the neighbouring zamindari families of Kutru and Bhopalpatnam in Bastar State, might be expected to be in some sense a focus or rallying point of tribal culture. But he and his relatives and agents (so far as the latter are Gond) are representatives of what Verrier Elwin describes as culturally the fourth class of aboriginals, the old aristocracy of the country who 'retain the old tribal name and their clan and totem rules and observe elements of tribal religion though they generally adopt the full Hindu faith and live in modern and even in European style'. He adds that the members of this fourth class may be said to have won the battle of culture-contact, since 'aristocratic tradition, economic stability or affluence, outside encouragement, a certain arrogance and self-confidence characteristic alike of ancient families and modern enterprise, have enabled them to assimilate the blessings of civilization without injury to themselves'; but he wisely reminds us that 'such educated progressive persons are not necessarily, simply because they are of aboriginal stock, the best qualified to represent their poorer brethren, of whose needs they often have only an elementary knowledge'.[1] The zamindar of Ahiri at least on the economic side has done much to preserve his tribal ryots from the evil effects of such sudden contacts as have reduced to 'despair and degradation' Elwin's third class of aboriginals, 'those who under the influence of external contact have begun to lose their hold on tribal culture, religion and social organization'.[2] He has accordingly himself been active in efforts to save his people from alien money-lenders, and was, for example, an active and valuable member of a voluntary debt conciliation board that worked in Sironcha tahsil in 1935-6.[3] Yet the fact that Ahiri, as the headquarters of the estate administration, especially when the estate has been under the Court of Wards, has become a centre of the modern way of life, has brought to Ahiri and Allapilli and all the adjacent villages a steady influx of outsiders, mostly Hindu, as officials, contractors, cloth and salt dealers, money-lenders and cultivators. The Dasehra festival, attended by ryots from all villagers coming to honour the zamindar as their Raja, has accustomed even remote Maria villagers to certain fundamental Hindu ideas. The Court of Wards administration has proceeded on its ruthless, standardized lines, to impose on the

[1] The quotations are from *The Aboriginals* (Oxford Pamphlet on India Affairs, No. 14, Bombay, 1943), pp. 10-11.
[2] Ibidem, p. 10.
[3] *The Aboriginal Problem*, pp. 285-6.

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

565 177 tribes controls and practices[1] evolved in non-tribal areas. Culturally therefore on the whole the zamindari administration has had a detribalizing influence. Economically by encouraging the opening up of the country and the settlement of outsiders it has led to economic exploitation of the Marias by money-lenders, village watchmen, and forest contractors.

655 466 166 The Allapilli forest depot on the other hand, with its sawmills attracting a constant stream of Marias as seasonal labourers, cartmen, etc., and with all its operations conducted departmentally by the Forest Service, has saved the aboriginals from exploitation by forest contractors and money-lenders. It has helped tribesmen to pass through the early stages of the difficult transition from an economy in kind to a cash economy. Rent and land revenue have to be paid in cash, salt and cloth to be bought for cash. Remote

622 791 [1] For example, the suppression of *podu* cultivation, or the deliberate curbing of the traditional influence of the religious and secular headmen, the *bhumia* and the *gaita*. A footnote to p. 453 of the *Chanda District Gazetteer* by the then Court of Wards Manager of the zamindari thus describes the latter process:

> The *Bhumia* is a Maria institution. He is the man responsible for all the religious ceremonies of the village; all the arrangements for their observance are framed by him, but the actual ceremony cannot be carried out without the help of the *pujari* of the village. In return for his services he is paid dues in grain and *mahua* from every tenant in the village. The office used to be hereditary and was transferable by sale or gift. The *Bhumia* was generally a man of great influence, and no village was founded or could hope to thrive without his formal permission. He was very much the headman of the village, and the office is even now highly prized. The *Bhumia* is not necessarily always a headman or *Gaita* of a village; sometimes the offices of *Bhumia* and *Gaita* are separate; this separation usually is due to poverty or loss of influence on the part of the *Bhumia* which necessitates the appointment of a man in a stronger position to manage the village, though the *Bhumia* still continues to draw his dues so long as he has not sold or transferred his right. *Gaita* is the term in general use for headman or *patel*. Before the estate came under the Court of Wards the *Bhumia* and *Gaita* were a power in the land, and it lay with them to make or mar a village, and the zamindar very seldom, if ever, received his full dues; the *Bhumia* and *Gaita* paid for one plough and cultivated five or six and in many cases also appropriated the rents of tenants who took up lands in the village.
>
> 'This has all changed since the estate came under Court of Wards and the position of the *Bhumia* and *Gaita* have been clearly defined at settlement. The former is now purely and simply considered a religious official, and has no connexion with land whatever; the office is hereditable but not transferable and the original appointment of a *Bhumia* to a waste village rests with the zamindar. The *Gaita* is now simply a headman or *patel*, who is paid a commission of two annas in the rupee on rentals and one anna in the rupee on *siwai* (miscellaneous) income as remuneration for his services.'

There could scarcely be a clearer example of administration divorced from anthropology. Imagine deliberately dissociating the *Bhumia*, the Earth-priest, from the land or *bhum*. Fortunately tribal custom has still proved too strong for the complete success of this 'reform'.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

411 in this book, but the Maria have a fine spear used for stabbing. Bows and arrows are not unlike those in use elsewhere. The arrows are either pointed or clubbed. Pellet bows are used for killing birds, as is the *engram*, the many-pointed wooden arrow which is illustrated here. The pointed iron arrow is that employed in most of the murders by shooting or stabbing. But the *engram* was used in one or two cases.

412 Implements of domestic use include the heavy rice-husker which is so constantly in the hands of the women. With this Oyami Masa in a fit of rage battered his cousin to death at Jabeli.[1] The Bison-horn Maria hoe (*korki*) is similar to that common in the plains, and a man once used it to kill his mother in a fit of drunkenness.[2]

283 The Maria have no subsidiary industries worth the name.
286 Spinning and weaving is taboo to them, though they are
285 allowed to spin rope from hemp and grass. They make baskets of leaves and bamboo, but mostly for their own domestic use. They are expert at making mats, which they either weave with grass and reeds on a frame or plait with bamboo slats. The Maria do their own ironwork and do it
326 well, for there is a plentiful supply of excellent ore. Those
565 Maria who take to smelting and blacksmithery are regarded as inferior by the others who generally do not inter-marry or eat with them. This rule is not, however, absolute and in other ways the Maria blacksmiths live as members of the tribe, join their dances and festivals and share the common life. For statistical purposes I have included the Maria blacksmiths among the other Maria in this book.

III

771 The religion of the Maria centres round the Earth, the State and the Clan. The Earth is the ultimate source of life and is personified in the Village Mother. The State is represented by Danteshwari, the tutelary goddess of the royal family: she is now sometimes identified with the Earth Mother or the Village Mother, but she often has a shrine or at least an image of her own, and her cult is rapidly increasing in popularity.

771 Developing out of the cult of the earth is the worship of
776 the clan-god. The traditional theory is that every clan is
614

[1] Case No 62. [2] Case No 72.